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ABSTRACT

Political orientations in children during a time period when Watergate and its ramifications were dominant political events are studied. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is one in which political learning is seen as evolving through an invariant sequence of developmental stages dependent on physical and intellectual growth. After the theory and method of the study are discussed, the cognitive-developmental approach of Jean Piaget is presented as a valid study of socialization. A civic education questionnaire was administered to 314 white students in grades 3-6 every year from 1973-76. The questions examined children's attitudes toward the president and political authority, plus their feelings about trust and confidence in government and the administrative body. Political environment is recognized as an important independent variable. Findings show the development of less positive attitudes toward the president, particularly regarding performance capabilities, that decline steadily from grades 3 to 6. It is concluded that negative attitudes toward political authority and institutions develop sequentially and in an accelerated manner; therefore, rapidly changing political events do have an impact on children's attitudes toward the president. (ND)

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

IN CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PRESIDENT:

Political Crisis to Political Celebration

by

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PRESIDENT

A major premise of political socialization research has been that childhood is a critical period in the development of attitudes toward political figures, particularly authority figures, and political institutions (see Easton and Dennis, 1969; Hess and Torney, 1967; Greenstein, 1960). More specifically, much previous research has shown that the child's initial conception of political authority is embodied primarily in the president who is perceived as being warm, benevolent, and a symbol of national pride (Easton and Dennis, 1969:165-208; Hess and Torney, 1967:32-59; Jaros, 1967:368-387; Hess and Easton, 1960:632-644; Greenstein, 1960:934-943). Some recent studies have begun to show that when different time periods and cultural groups are taken into consideration these ideal qualities loom less large in the mind of the child (Jaros, Hirsch, Fleron, 1968; Greenberg, 1969; Garcia, 1973). Yet, even during a time of near-maximum political stress (impeachment/resignation) there still has been a tendency on the part of the relatively young children to idealize the president and to assign to him larger-than-life benevolent attributes (Dennis, 1975:3; Hershey and Hill, 1975:8-12).

Thus, the Nixon debacle,[1] regardless of how history eventually interprets it, has provided political socialization researchers with an excellent opportunity to reexamine the processes by which children acquire evaluative postures toward political authority. This is especially so with investigators who replicate previous studies or those who were in the process of studying the development of political attitudes in children when "Watergate" broke as a viable issue. For example, research conducted

before- during- and after-Watergate could possibly help to determine whether children were able to distinguish between the role-occupant (president) and the institution (presidency) by measuring attitudinal continuity/change over time. And now, as the events which brought on the political crisis pass further into history, questions arise as to whether the crisis may have had any lasting impact (effect) on developing attitudes toward the president. We know, for example, that research conducted during the Watergate hearings or shortly following Mr. Nixon's resignation show considerably less positive--if not outright negative--attitudes toward the president as a political authority figure (see Greenstein, 1975; Arterton, 1974, 1975; Hershey and Hill, 1975; Lupfer and Kenny, 1974; Hartwig and Tidmarch, 1974; Shoemaker and Jaros, 1975; Rogers and Lewis, 1975).

It should be noted at the outset that this is not a study of children's attitudes toward Watergate per se, but a study of the development of political orientations in children during a time period when Watergate and its ramifications were dominate political events. Therefore, the thrust of the political development project is the explication of a theoretical framework within which continuity and change in childhood political orientations can be described, and where possible, explained over time. Since we have elaborated rather extensively on the particular theoretical framework and methodological procedures adopted for the political development project elsewhere, we will only present an overview of our theory and method (See Bailey, 1975a; Bailey, 1975b) here.

THEORY AND METHOD

There are a variety of theories from related disciplines which describe how people learn; however, approaches to the study of socialization tend to be subsumed under three broad categories: psychodynamic, social-learning, and cognitive-developmental. Although all three approaches have their merits and limitations, we are primarily interested in the cognitive-developmental (CD) approach as presented by Jean Piaget (See, for example, Piaget 1968; Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), and its application to how political knowledge, values, and norms are learned (acquired)(see Bailey, 1975b:17-38, for an explication of the learning/acquisition process and the political socialization literature).

Cognitive-developmental approach

Any exploration of Piaget's concepts of the development of cognitive and affective thinking in children should begin with a caveat. That is, it should be noted at the outset that it is doubtful whether, in regard to politics, many individuals ever develop cognitive structures (mental organizations and operations) of the same magnitude as with other social and physical phenomena. However, a Piagetian framework can be most enlightning in regard to other aspects of the development of political orientations in children. For example, a CD framework may help us understand and answer some of the "stability/instability" questions raised by political socialization investigators and their critics (see Vaillancourt, 1973a, 1973b; Marsh, 1971); it can help explain the "time-lag"[2] frequently found between the development of political concepts in different social classes, ethnic and cultural groups (see Jaros, Hirsch, and Fleron, 1968; Greenberg, 1969); and, because of its hierarchical nature (i.e., dependent on invariant,

sequential, stages), it can be useful in explaining human inflexibility in accepting undesirable political stimuli. We realize, of course, that no single approach will likely yield a complete understanding of the socialization process.[3] However, we discern some definite advantages in adopting an eclectic approach over some of the more restrictive behavioral approaches. The CD approach is said to be "eclectic" in that it is acknowledged by its advocates to include "all of the possible factors which could conceivably be advanced to account for human development" (Zigler and Child, 1973:12). That is, the CD approach is aimed at studying the "interaction of maturational and environmental influences recognizing the general importance and interdependence of both" (Inhelder, 1968:vi).

Briefly, then, it can be said that a basic tenet of the CD approach is the idea that knowledge is not just a reflection of reality but the result of active interaction between the subject and his environment. We believe the CD approach acceptable for several reasons: 1) as an interactionist position, it stands as a major theoretical alternative to the "passive child" view so frequently adopted by early (political) socialization investigators; and 2) cognitive development is primarily concerned with the development of reasoning abilities through biological growth and experience. That is, the CD approach considers development to be the interaction of at least four factors, each considered necessary, but not sufficient in and of itself, as an explanation of development (Ginsburg and Opper, 1969:169-173): (a) physiological maturation, particularly the development of the central nervous system; (b) experience, both physical and logical-mathematical (i.e., contact and exposure to concrete objects themselves as well as mental activities); (c) social transmission of

knowledge, or knowledge received from external agents (e.g., parents, teachers, the media--it should be noted that although social transmission promotes cognitive development, in order to receive the information transmitted, the child must possess the appropriate cognitive structures); and (d) equilibration, which refers to the "child's self-regulatory processes" and functions as an integrating force for the other three factors (Elkind, 1968).

We should note that a distinction should be made between one's "capacity for intelligence" or thought processes, and one's possession of "knowledge or information systems" (cognitive structures[4]). The possession of knowledge is not the same as one's capacity for knowing. Here Piaget is saying that knowledge about reality is not attributable entirely to experience (the action of things upon us), but also to reason (our mental actions upon things). Likewise, he claims that children progress from perceptions--→ images--→ operations along an action-thought continuum (Elkind, 1974). Thus, the adaptive characteristics of the child are based on intellectual structures which utilize three basic concepts at all stages of development. These three concepts--assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration--are tied in with the child's mental operations and cognitive structures which are called "schematas."[5] For Piaget, then, the schematas, or intellectual operations, are acquired through the interaction of organism and the environment in a sequential, invariant, and highly "lawful" and systematic progression from perceptions to operations (see Harter, 1973).

At a minimum, Piaget posits that there are four basic stages of development (sensorimotor, peroperational, concrete operational, and formal operational), each of which is related to age.[6] Each stage is considered to have evolved from the lower stage by way of forming or

assimilating mental images of perceived things, events, objects; by accommodating new perceptions that contradict existing images; and by equilibration, which functions as the corrective apparatus for the imbalance created by the conflicting processes of assimilation and accommodation. Briefly, the first stage, sensorimotor, occurs before the advent of language usually considered to be between birth and two years of age. The second stage is that of "pre-operational thought" whereby the child is capable of having representational and symbolic thoughts and is characterized by language and concept development--ages two to approximately seven years. The third stage, that of operational thought, is characterized by the internalization of "concrete operations" which permits the child to do in his head what he has had to do by actual manipulation during the earlier stage--usually from seven to thirteen or fourteen years of age. And the fourth stage, that of "formal operational thought," is one whereby newly acquired operations permit the adolescent "to think about his thoughts." By this, Piaget means that the operations are no longer applied solely to the manipulation of concrete objects, but now cover "hypotheses and propositions that the child can use abstractly and from which he can reach deductions by formal or logical means" (Elkind, 1974; Merelman, 1969) In sum, each stage consists of new mental abilities which set the limits and determine the character of what can be learned during that period. Since the ages of the children included in the political development project range between seven and seventeen, we will be primarily concerned with the third and fourth stages with emphasis on concrete operational thought.

Research design and procedures

Since the first empirical study students of political socialization have talked about the desirability of longitudinal research designs as being necessary for the identification of developmental patterns of political behavior. With few expections (see Newcomb, 1958, 1967; Jennings and Niemi, 1973; Jennings and Markus, 1974a, 1974b), most political socialization investigators have dealt with the "developmental" problem by examining children at different grade levels at one point in time, i.e., cross-sectional designs. This has frequently been labeled a "longidutinal perspective" or a "quasi-longitudinal" design (Jennings and Niemi, 1974:251-316; Garcia, 1973:23). The basic assumption has been that any differences found between children in the lower grades were differences which constituted developmental patterns. It has been (is) also assumed that by examining patterns of childhood development we might better explain adult political behavior. Jaros, among others, has challenged this approach as making an unsubstantiated inferential leap (Jaros, 1973:21-23). Thus, the relative absence of longitudinal research, particularly on the acquisition of political orientations by children, remains one of the critical problem areas in the development of socialization theory (for a more detailed examination of longitudinal research designs, see Bailey, 1975b:86-93).

Recognizing some of the limitations of previous research efforts and the need for some type of longitudinal design, our study represents a multi-stage attempt at measuring the development of political orientations in children over time. The political development project, of course, is not a definitive study of the developmental stages of cognitive growth from childhood to adult. However, by combining the study of individuals over a period of time (longitudinal) and at successive stages

(grade-across-time) with the more traditional cross-sectional methods of survey research, we have "telescoped" a considerable time span into a relatively short period of time. That is, by interviewing at three different grade levels each year we were able to telescope grades three through eleven into a four-year time period. Since students of political behavior cannot assume environmental stability and, therefore, must attempt to account for the impact of any unusual environmental stimuli (particularly of the magnitude of political events since 1963), our design required a "control" sample, i.e., interviews with students in the same grade at different points in time (grade-across-time). This would help in our efforts to account for the impact of political events as opposed to maturational changes as our longitudinal sample advanced in grade/age[7] (for a more detailed account of the impact of political environment--events--on the development of political orientations, see Bailey, 1975a). The interviews were conducted as follows:

1973	1974	1975	1976
3rd		*	*
	4th		
		5th	
6th		*	6th
	7th		
		8th	
9th		*	9th
	10th		
		11th	
			--

*Grade-across-time (GAT) interviews were collected at this time, also.

The first two tiers (3rd through 6th; 6th through 9th) represent grades

in which longitudinal data were collected. Due to the great influx of students into the area high schools from junior high schools not included in the original interviews, longitudinality was not required (although many of the same students were interviewed as ninth, tenth and eleventh graders and will be accounted for later). The link between the longitudinal tiers, of course, is the sixth grades 1973 and 1976. These grades serve both the longitudinal sample and the control or grade-across-time (GAT) sample.

In sum, then, the political development project required the administration of the "civic education questionnaire" (CEQ) to students as third, sixth and ninth graders (CEQ I); as fourth, seventh and tenth graders (CEQ II); as (third), fifth, (sixth), eighth and (ninth) graders (CEQ III); and as (third), sixth and ninth (the last two serve both the GAT and longitudinal samples) graders (CEQ IV).

In accordance with the above procedures, the present study focuses on responses to selected questions as administered to a white* sample of 314 students (as third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders)[8] located in a mid-south SMSA. The interviews were conducted at twelve month intervals, beginning in March 1973, and concluding in March 1976. The students were interviewed in their classrooms by the author and specially trained senior/graduate students. In addition to longitudinal comparisons, references will also be made to a cross-sectional sample, 1975, and grade-across-time samples: third grade GAT equal 1976 data; sixth grade GAT equal 1973.

*This SMSA has less than 2% black population; however, black/white data were collected from a Mississippi delta community and another mid-south SMSA. As of this date, these data sets have not been processed. It should also be noted that a rural/subcultural (Ozark Mountain) school district was included in the survey design and will be included later as comparative data.

RESULTS

Two sets of items (questions) have been selected to examine children's attitudes toward the president and political authority. The first set has to do with authority functions, while the second is specifically aimed at measuring perceptions of the president's span of influence and importance.

1. Who does the most to make laws for the United States?
   1-Congress 2-President 3-Supreme Court 4-not sure

2. Who does the most to run the United States?
   1-Congress 2-President 3-Supreme Court 4-not sure

3. Which one of the following does the most to keep peace in the world?
   1-Congress 2-President 3-United Nations 4-not sure

and

1. The President helps to give us liberty and freedom.
2. The President tries to help poor people.
3. The President helps a lot to keep the government running.
4. The President is honest when compared with most men.
5. The President tells other countries what to do.
6. If black and white people don't start to get along better, the President will try to force them to.

Responses: 1-yes 2-not sure 3-no

Additional questions, such as, trust and confidence in government and who makes decisions, will be included where relevant.

In regard to the first set of questions Hess and Torney (1967:32) found that, initially, children conceptualize government (political institutions) as "persons to whom they can relate." According to Easton and Dennis (1969:117) young children tend to focus "directly upon personal or perhaps charismatic aspects of the political authorities for (their) interpretation of what government is." The authors, contend,

however, that as children develop higher cognitive structures, their image is less likely to be confined to "persons" and more likely to shift to what has been called the "group character of government." That is, children seem to acquire an awareness of governmental institutions, such as, Congress, the Supreme Court, and the United Nations. In like manner, this more complex image of what government is brings with it a more concrete understanding of what government does. For example, in asking, "What does the government do?" we found that the younger children (7-9 years old) were more apt to answer from a singular, non-relational point of view: "make laws," "protect us," "rule," and "run the country," whereas slightly older children (10-13) tend to conceptualize government as a relationship, such as: "make laws for the country," "give us democracy so we can vote," "protect us and give us peace," "collect taxes and spend our money." Although from a developmental point of view the verbatim responses will tell us more about cognitive growth, here we are interested only in whether or not the students gave relevant or irrelevant responses. In this regard, results from our 1975 cross-sectional data show that relevant responses were given by 53% of the third graders (n=123), 69% of the sixth graders (n=111), and 75% of the ninth graders (n=642).

As with several other "knowledge" questions we followed up "What does the government do?" with a two-part information/source question:

> We would like to know how you learned about what the government does. From which of the following did you find out about what the government does?
> 1-Your Mother 2-Your Father 3-Your Friends 4-Television
> 5-Newspapers 6-Your Teachers 7-Other (specify)_____.
>
> Which ONE of the above would you say you learned the most from? Just place the number on this line._____.

As with most of our knowledge questions ("What is Watergate?" "What is impeachment?" and "What does it mean when the President 'pardons' someone?") television consistently ranks high as the primary source of information. One slight deviation is evident in regard to the acquisition of knowledge about regime norms, e.g., impeachment and pardon, where the teacher gains a respectable place as an information source. For this cross-sectional sample, TABLE 1 shows that for third graders, television and parents, respectively, function as primary sources for knowing what the government does. The same is true for the sixth graders; however, over half of the

TABLE 1: Information Source for "How Did You Learn about What the Government Does": Percent by Grade (cross-sectional, 1975)

	Third	Sixth	Ninth
Parents[a]	23	18	7
Friends	1	2	2
Television	45	53	28
Newspapers	8	9	6
Teachers	7	11	51
Others	9	6	4
No Response	7	3	3
	n=232	n=161	n=856

[a]"Mother" and "Father" have been combined to form a single response "Parents"

ninth graders stated that they learned the most about what the government does from their teachers. This is not too surprising since this mid-south state requires by law that ninth graders take a "civics" course

or American government before entering high school.

As a means of further probing into the child's image of government we asked a series of questions about the child's conception of the origin of laws and about governmental administration. We know from previous research, that cognitive maturation seems to be involved in developmental changes relevant to the conception of government (Adelson and Beall, 1970: 499). Along the same lines, Sigel (1970:9) states that "the understanding a child has of social events is dependent on the stages of his cognitive development at a given chronological age. . . . (B)y adolescence the organism has learned to handle highly complex and abstract thought processes." Given the close age range of our children longitudinally (8-12 with a few seven and thirteen year olds), we would expect only gradual changes in responses toward their conception of government; and, we would presume that GAT responses would show little if any perceptual change. We would argue that any significant change during the four-year time period could be attributed to the rapidly changing political environment. This is particularly so if there were a dramatic shift in attitudes between 1973 and 1974, or if there were to be a "rebound" in positive attitudes toward the President in 1975. Figures 1 through 3 show these trends.

More generally, we found, as did the Chicago study, that for "Who makes laws for the United States?" (TABLE 2) there is an early dominance by the President (50%); however, we note that by the sixth grade Congress has gained a respectable place as the "lawmaker" (51.9%). In both studies we note that by the fourth grade there is a somewhat significant shift (27% and 22%, respectively) away from the President, however, not directly to the Congress. It is not until the children are fifth graders that they

Fig. 1

Who Makes Laws?

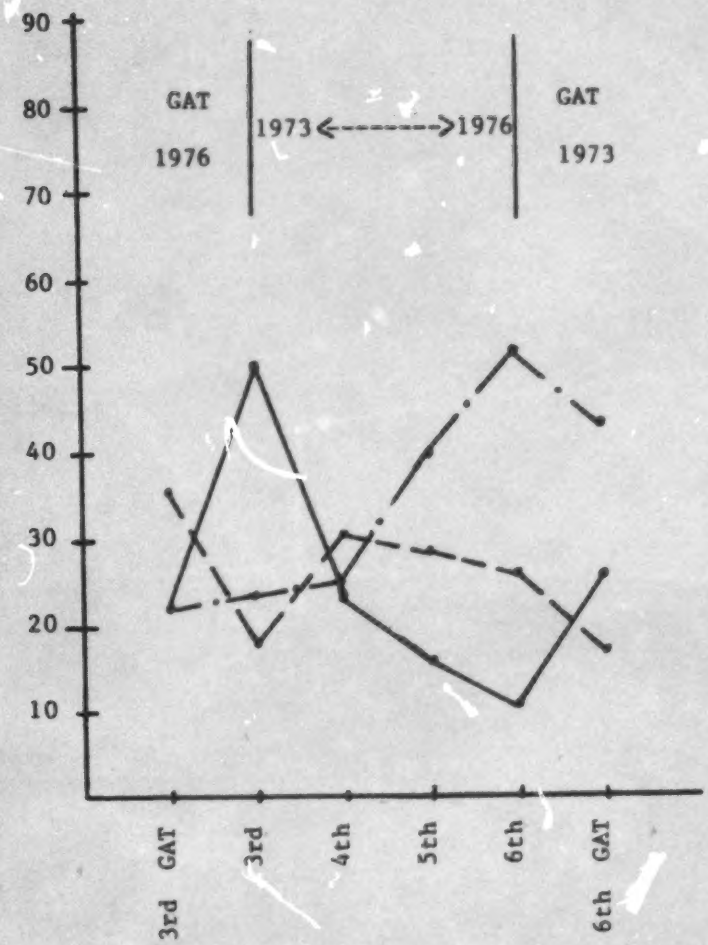
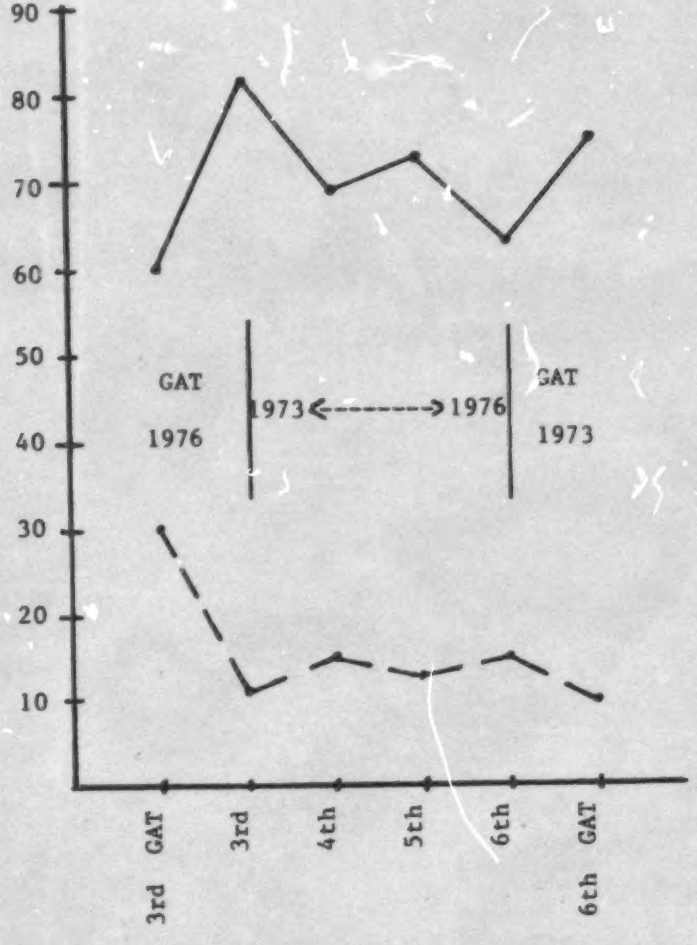


Fig. 2

Who Runs the Country?

president
not sure
congress



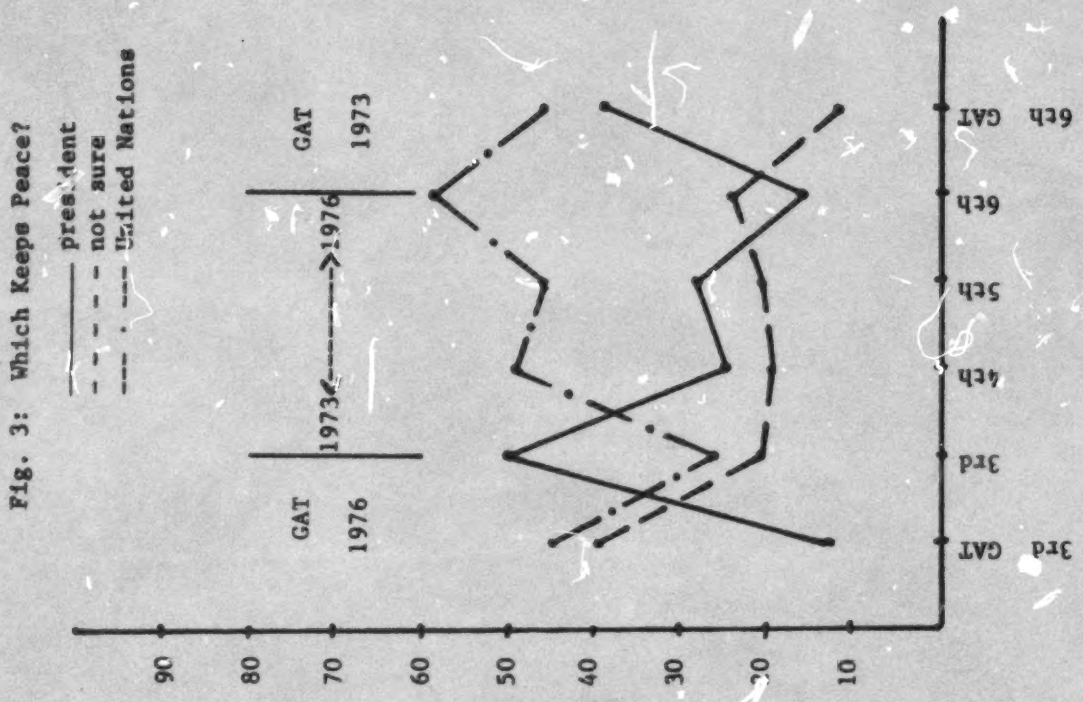


TABLE 2: Development of an Awareness of "Who Does the Most to Make Laws for the United States?" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976	EASTON/DENNIS[b] HESS/TORNEY	
Congress	3	23.6			(21.4)	11	3
	4		25.2			28	4
	5			39.8		57	5
	6	(43.1)			51.9	65	6
President		50.0			(25.5)	66	3
			23.2			44	4
				16.2		19	5
		(22.2)			10.5	13	6
Supreme Court		8.6			(10.7)	17	3
			21.0			21	4
				15.6		20	5
		(15.1)			11.8	18	6
Not sure		17.8			(45.6)	6	3
			30.6			7	4
				28.4		3	5
		(16.4)			25.8	3	6

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third N = 352; Sixth N = 318
[b]Easton and Dennis, 1969:119; Hess and Torney, 1967:35

give the law-making function to the Congress (Hess and Torney note that the "most striking change occurred between grades four and five" 1967:33) Our cross-sectional data (1975, not shown here) support this trend and by the ninth grade fully three-fourths of the students support Congress as the primary law-making body (Bailey, 1975b:103). We do not find this exceptional since in a developmental framework older children are expected to have more differentiated and institutionalized views of the political community. What is significant, and perhaps indicative of an environmental impact as opposed to simple maturation, is the noticeable shift in Presidential support by our GAT samples: -25% at the third grade (50 -25) and -12% at the sixth grade (22 -10). It should be noted that the shift in the 1976 GAT is away from both the President and Congress and to not sure! Although further analysis is necessary, this could be an indication of disenchantment with the national government period.

An initial examination of the the next three tables (TABLE 3, TABLE and TABLE indicates a propensity for the yourger children to support the President; however, upon closer examination we note a similar GAT shift from personal toward institutional perceptions of government in regard to who runs the country (-22% and -11%, respectively), who keeps peace in the world (-37% and -23%, respectively), and who decides whether or not a law is constitutional (-13% and -18%, respectively). When these results are combined with the more or less assumed maturational shifts between grades, we believe that we can make the inference that some outside stimulus, such as a dramatically changing political environment, has produced a political "experience" which could not be readily assimilated (without being distorted), thereby facilitating the development of a

TABLE 3: Development of an Awareness of "Who Does the Most to Run the United States?" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976	EASTON/DENNIS[b] HESS/TORNEY	
Congress	3	4.8			(7.9)	7	3
	4		8.6			13	4
	5			9.6		20	5
	6	(11.6)			16.9	25	6
President	3	81.8			(59.9)	85	3
	4		68.8			77	4
	5			72.9		72	5
	6	(74.5)			63.1	66	6
Supreme Court	3	2.2			(1.6)	3	3
	4		6.4			3	4
	5			4.5		3	5
	6	(3.8)			4.5	3	6
Not sure	3	11.1			(30.6)	5	3
	4		16.2			6	4
	5			13.0		4	5
	6	(30.6)			15.6	4	6

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318
[b]Easton and Dennis, 1969:120; Hess and Torney, 1967:35

modified "image" of the President. Longitudinal shifts for each of the four items (responses of "President" as third and fourth graders) are: -27%, -16%, -24%, -20%, respectively; however, on every item except "who makes laws" there is a slight "rebound" by the children as fifth graders. More significant than the children seeming to settle into a more "normal" pattern as sixth graders are the differences registered by the GAT data for each grade. For example, for TABLE 3, "Who does the most to run the United States?" the GAT comparisons are 81.8% to 59.9% for the third graders and 74.5% to 63.1% for the sixth graders. Since we must assume that maturational effects are held constant at each grade level, we can infer that some outside "stimulus" has brought about these less positive attitudes toward the President.

TABLE 4: Development of an Awareness of "Who Does the Most to Keep Peace in the World?" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Congress	3	4.1			(2.4)
	4		6.1		
	5			4.5	
	6	(3.5)			1.0
President	3	50.0			(12.7)
	4		24.8		
	5			28.7	
	6	(39.0)			16.2
United Nations	3	25.5			(45.2)
	4		49.4		
	5			46.1	
	6	(45.9)			58.6
Not sure	3	20.4			(39.7)
	4		19.7		
	5			20.7	
	6	(11.6)			24.2

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318

TABLE 5: Development of an Awareness of "Who Decides the Constitutionality of Laws?" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Senate	3	12.1			(4.4)
	4		11.1		
	5			12.1	
	6	(13.0)			13.7
President	3	43.0			(36.1)
	4		24.8		
	5			30.9	
	6	(42.0)			24.2
Supreme Court	3	21.0			(18.3)
	4		27.7		
	5			16.6	
	6	(20.6)			35.7
House of Representatives	3	23.9			(41.3)
	4		34.7		
	5			37.6	
	6	(23.6)			26.4

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318.
Exact wording: "Which of the following decides whether or not a law follows the rules of the country?"

In reference to these findings, we know from previous research that experiencing political events of a crisis-like nature, such as the depression of the 1930's, World War II, and more recently, presidential assassination (and attempted assassination), and massive protest movements (both racial and in opposition to Vietnam), can affect the political character of an entire generation. Jennings and Niemi (1974) note that support for the eighteen-year-old vote and increased political cynicism are examples of attitude development partially dependent on the young directly or indirectly experiencing external events. They go on to say that (1974:330-331)

> even in the very earliest stages of political life the child is not simply a reflecting glass which mirrors the image of others. Rather, the child's own needs and drives, mental and physical endowments, and evolving cognitive structures vitally influence the way in which political stimuli are initially interpreted and absorbed and later on are sought out and used.

But are these newly acquired political orientations really "interiorized" or are they merely a reflection of specific situations and events? Had this been a simple cross-sectional sample the tendency would have been to infer that the differences indicate an ability for the children to differentiate between role occupant and the institution--leading to the general inference of differential learning. Our combination of samples (longitudinal and GAT) gives us reason to believe that extreme changes in the social and political milieus may have accelerated the learning experience. However, since we have noted that our children are on the "border" of the concrete operational stage and that developmental differences are maximum for tasks of a non-operational nature and for an operational nature that calls for the recognition of symbolic structures, we would expect those changes to be less stable in the short term because of the vacilation frequently evident between developmental stages.

In regard to the stability of learning we have stated (Bailey, 1975b:68-69) that genuine learning occurs only after the child has acquired the necessary cognitive structures for the inculcation of newly encountered information. What this means is that whenever the requisite cognitive structures are present, the child is capable of learning from the world and has the ability to understand reality; when these structures are absent, new experiences have only superficial effects. If there is too great a disparity between the experiences and the level of development, we said that one of two things could happen: either the child transforms the experience into a form which can be readily assimilated (even at the risk of distortion) and consequently does not learn what is intended, or else the child merely learns a specific (superficial) response which has no stability. Since we know that many political orientations are not firmly established until well into adulthood (indicating that if the formal operational stage is ever reached it is considerably later than the same relative stages of physical and social development), this means that "attitudinal and behavioral transformations (occur because of) the experiencing of political events and work-related learning as well as from the more conventional sources of home and school" (Jennings and Niemi, 1974:331). In reference to "discontinuities," Jennings and Niemi note that only moderate intrusions are required to bring about changes in youthful political orientations. These discontinuities, they say, can develop (1974:332)

> because of some conflict amongst socialization agents even in "quiet" times, because parents in particular do not systematically try to mold the political character of their children, because political events are experienced, and because one's political learning proceeds apace with maturational and life space changes. . . .

We contend that the stage of cognitive maturity, the complexity of the stimulus encountered, and relevant experiences help determine continuity and change in early childhood orientations.

To summarize this portion, we can say that our data support the Chicago findings and indicate a developmental trend in regard to the personalization or impersonalization of the national government. That is, our data support the contention that children "subsequently (develop) a more impersonal and institutionalized conception of the government" (Hess and Torney, 1967:36). In fact, there is some indication that our children (as fourth graders, anyway, and by GAT comparisons) tend to shift to a recognition of the group character of government earlier than might be expected. We have suggested that because of the magnitude of events since 1973 (particularly those between the first and third waves of interviews), such as, the resignation of a vice president, under duress, for the first time in history, the exposure of the Watergate affair involving the President of the United States, and the forced resignation of the President under threat of impeachment, incongruities in intial positive images of political authority (specifically, the President) have evolved. It is highly probably that the Senate Watergate investigation hearings and the House impeachment procedings have influenced the children in our sample. Further analysis and the inclusion of the second tier (sixth through ninth graders) of our children may help explain this deviation.

Our second set of questions shows us parts of the "cognitive base" underlying the child's earliest image. The items relevant to an understanding of the cognitive image concern the relative important of the

President's role in the political system (see Easton and Denniss, 1969: 173-175). We know from previous research that beginning at an early age, at least as young as the third grade (Easton and Dennis, 1969; Hess and Torney, 1967), children regard the President as being highly important and as having grave responsibilities. However, at the same time there is an increasing realization of limitations to the role of the President as a political authority (Easton and Dennis, 1969:174).

Applying principal components factor analysis (SPSS, version 6) to our data we find two distinct attitudinal dimensions in our children in regard to our "presidential inclination" items. TABLE 6 shows us that four of our six items load on the same factors at each grade level; the other two items, however, definitely tap a different attitude in the children (orders other countries and black/white integration). This is graphically displayed for us in Figures 4 to 9. It is easy to succumb to the temptation to infer that the deviate attitudes are directly related to Vietnam and current and recent racial tensions. We will resist the temptation, however, until the inclusion of our issue saliency data--items concerning an awareness of and the discussion of current political issues. Are these limitations on the President's authority?

With the exception of the above, and the issue of presidential "honesty", these data indicate that in all grades there is a consensus (60% or above) of opinion among our children to see the President as helping to run the government and helping to give us liberty and freedom. There is a tendency for the responses to become less positive with age (longitudinally); yet, they are supportive of presidential importance. The third item--tries to help poor people--fits this same pattern with

TABLE 6: Presidential Perception Components for Longitudinal Grades 3 - 6: Principal Component Factors

	Factor 1 6th	Factor 2 5th	Factor 3 4th	Factor 4 3rd
1. The President helps to give us liberty and freedom.	.615	.611	.731	.581
2. The President is honest when compared with most men.	--	.604	.400	.615
3. The President tries to help poor people.	.580	.516	.539	.340
4. The President tells other countries what to do.	(-.064)	--	(-.171)	(-.033)
5. If black and white people don't start to get along better, the President will try to force them to.	(-.273)	--	(-.099)	(-.021)
6. The President helps a lot to keep the government running	.563	.676	.489	.465
Additional Items Loading on the same Factor:				
7. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?	.546	(.266)	(.226)	--
8. How much trust and confidence would you say you have in the people who run our government?	.635	.349	--	--
9. How would you rate the government in regard to -- Honesty	.372	(.027)	--	--
10. . . . Fairness to others.	.439	(.134)	--	--
11. . . . Justice.	(.253)	(.124)		

Items with -- under Factors indicate that question was not asked.

Parentheses ( ) indicate loadings of .300 or less.

Fig. 4

President
Helps Run the Government

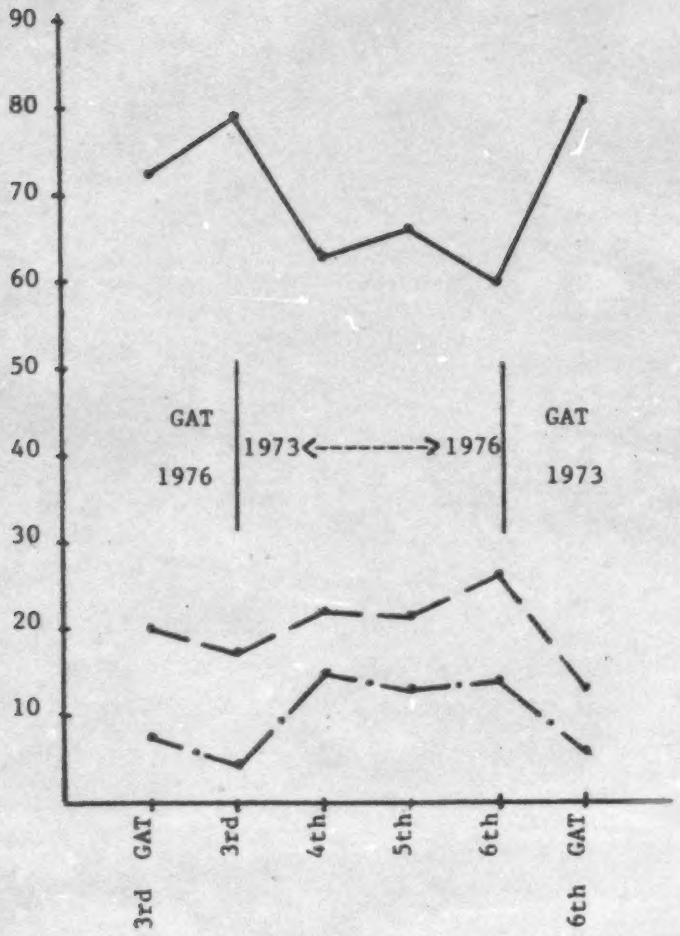


Fig. 5

President
Gives Liberty/Freedom

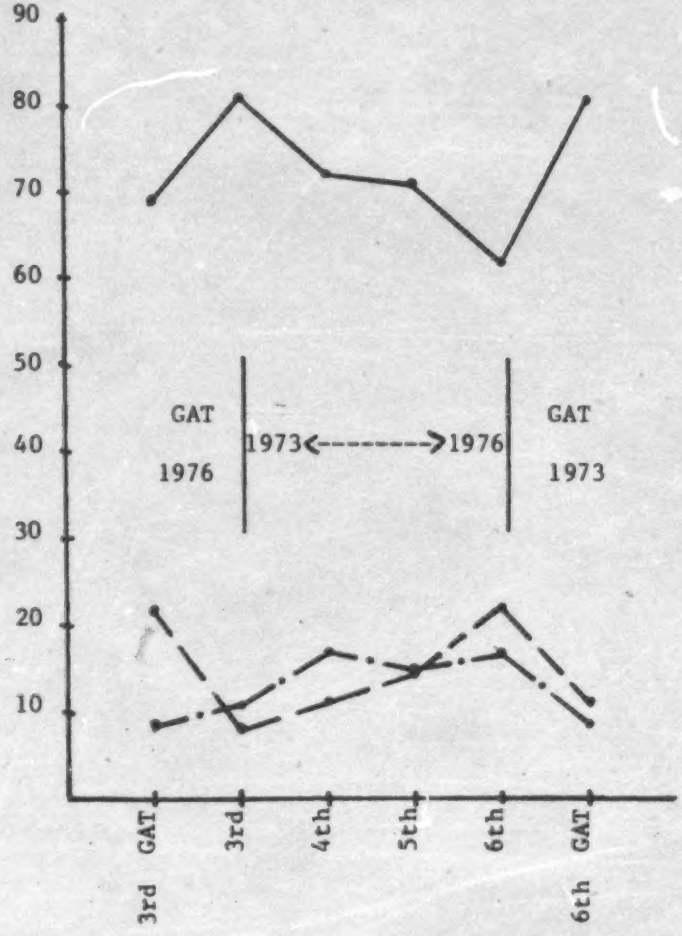


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Fig. 6

President
Helps the Poor

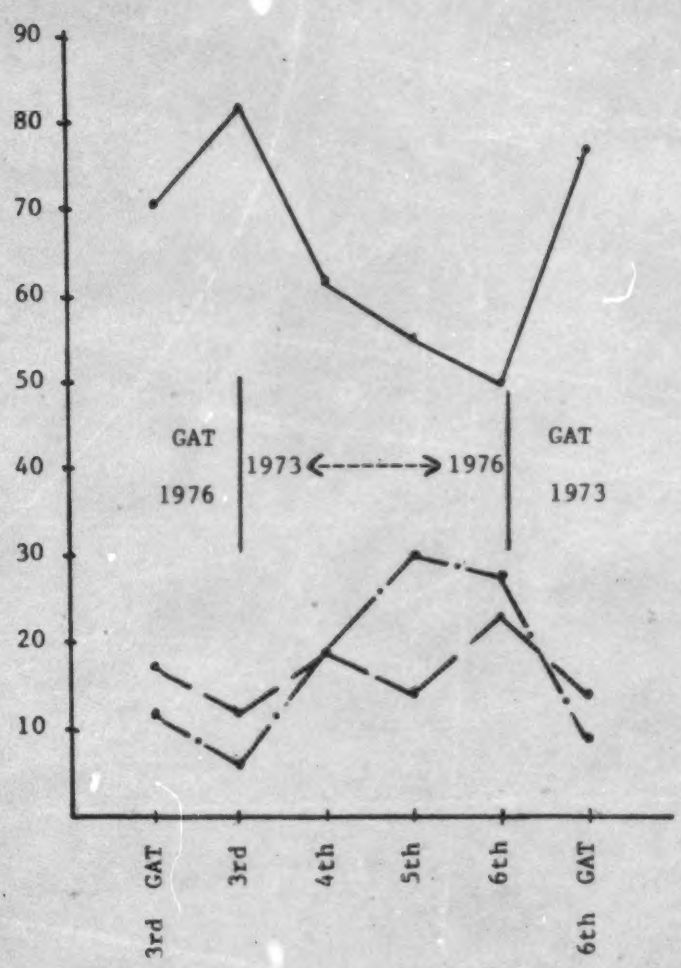

Fig. 7

President
Is More Honest

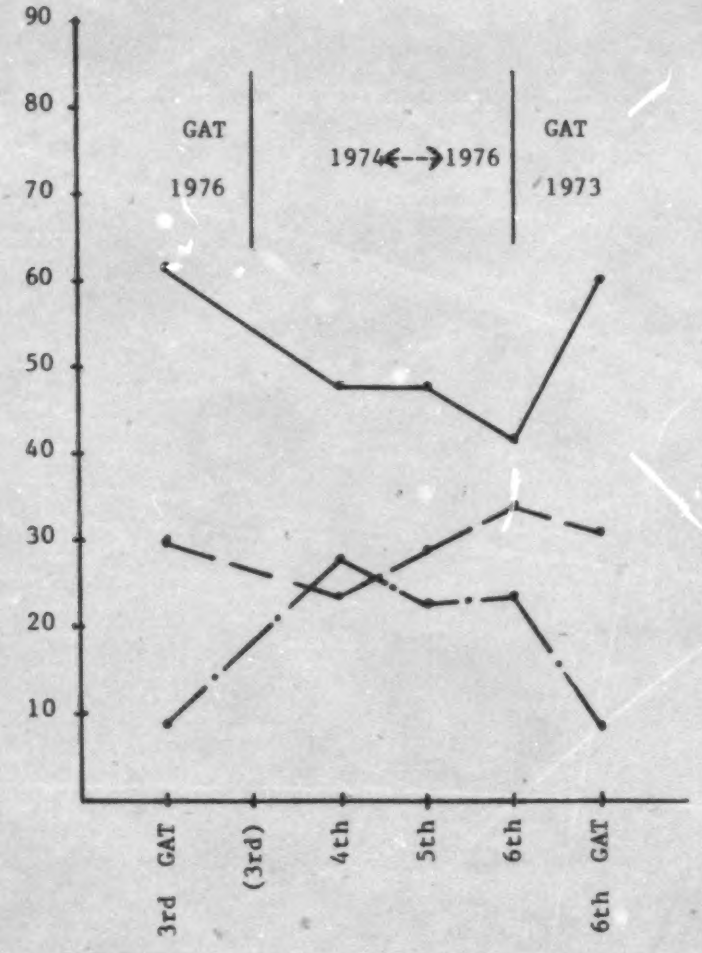

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Fig. 8

President
Orders Other Countries

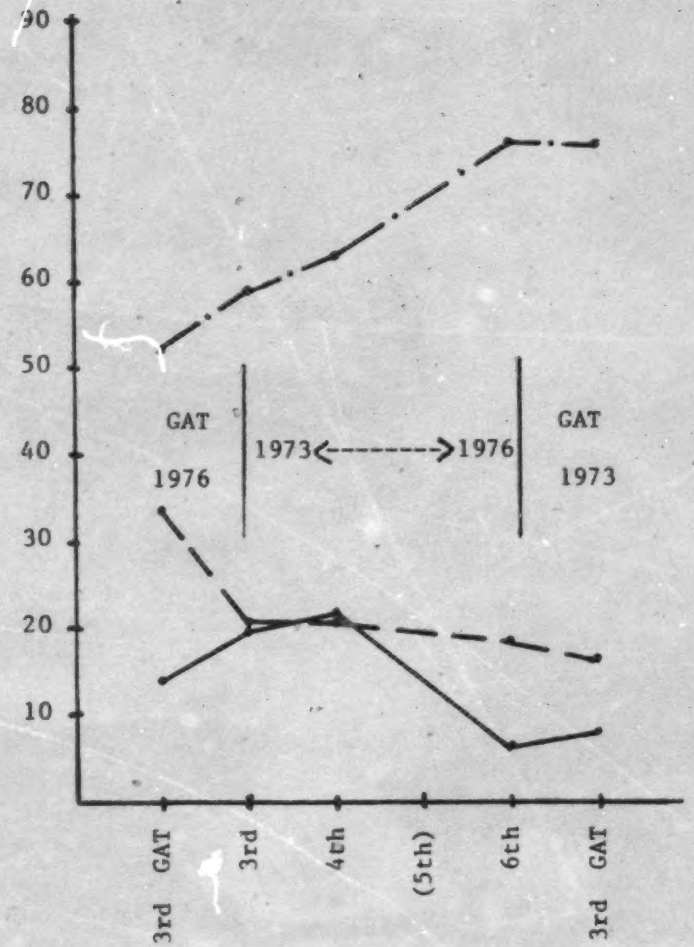

Fig. 9

President
And Black/White People

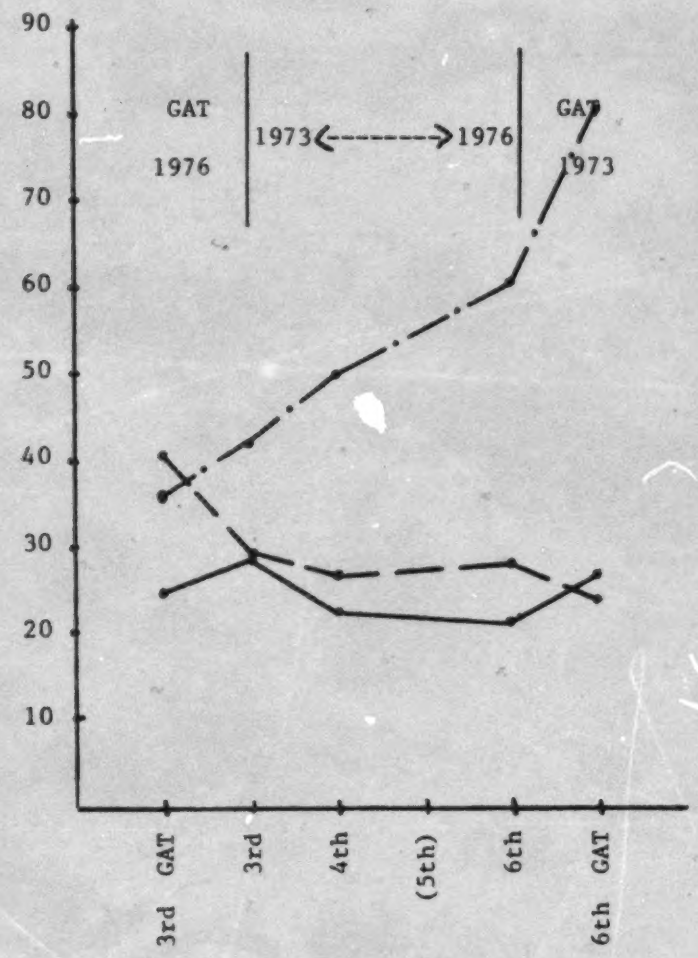

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TABLE 7: Changes in Perception of "The President Helps a Lot to Keep the Government Running" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	79.3			(81.1)
	4		63.1		
	5			66.2	
	6	(72.6)			59.9
Not sure	3	16.9			(13.2)
	4		21.9		
	5			21.0	
	6	(19.8)			25.8
No	3	3.8			(5.7)
	4		15.0		
	5			12.7	
	6	(7.5)			14.3

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318

TABLE 8: Changes in Perception of "The President Helps to Give Us Liberty and Freedom" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	81.0			(80.5)
	4		72.0		
	5			70.7	
	6	(69.4)			61.8
Not sure	3	7.9			(10.7)
	4		11.1		
	5			14.3	
	6	(21.8)			21.7
No	3	11.1			(8.8)
	4		16.9		
	5			15.0	
	6	(8.7)			16.6

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352 Sixth = 318

TABLE 9: Changes in Perception of "The President Tries to Help Poor People" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	82.2			(70.6)
	4		62.4		
	5			55.1	
	6	(77.0)			49.7
Not Sure	3	11.8			(17.5)
	4		18.6		
	5			14.3	
	6	(13.8)			22.9
No	3	6.1			(11.9)
	4		19.1		
	5			30.3	
	6	(9.1)			27.4

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318

TABLE 10: Changes in Perception of "The President Is Honest when Compared with Most Men" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	--			(61.5)
	4		48.1		
	5			48.4	
	6	(60.3)			42.4
Not sure	3	--			(29.8)
	4		23.9		
	5			28.7	
	6	(31.0)			33.8
No	3	--			(8.7)
	4		23.9		
	5			22.6	
	6	(8.7)			23.9

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third =352; Sixth = 318

TABLE 11: Changes in Perception of "The President Tells Other Countries What to Do" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	19.7			(13.9)
	4		21.7		
	5			--	
	6	(8.2)			5.7
Not sure	3	21.0			(33.7)
	4		15.6		
	5			--	
	6	(16.4)			18.5
No	3	59.2			(52.4)
	4		62.7		
	5			--	
	6	(75.5)			75.8

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318

TABLE 12: Changes in Perception of "If Black and White People Don't Start to Get Along Better, The President Will Try to Force Them to" -- Percent by Grade -- Longitudinally and Grade-Across-Time (GAT)

	GRADE[a]	1973	1974	1975	1976
Yes	3	28.6			(24.6)
	4		22.9		
	5			--	
	6	(17.3)			11.1
Not sure	3	29.0			(40.5)
	4		26.8		
	5			--	
	6	(23.9)			28.3
No	3	42.4			(34.9)
	4		50.3		
	5			--	
	6	(58.8)			60.5

[a]Longitudinal N's = 314; GAT: Third = 352; Sixth = 318

the exception of the sixth graders which falls below 50%. These findings hold, and give some credibility to developmental inferences from cross-sectional data, for our 1975 cross-sectional sample (TABLE 13).

TABLE 13: Presidential Perception Items -- Percent by Grade -- Cross-sectionally, 1975.

	LIBERTY/FREEDOM		
	Yes	Not Sure	No
Third	87	7	6
Sixth	71	11	18
Ninth	60	20	20

	RUN GOVERNMENT		
	Yes	Not Sure	No
Third	82	12	7
Sixth	67	16	17
Ninth	66	19	15

	HELP POOR		
	Yes	Not Sure	No
Third	78	9	13
Sixth	53	13	32
Ninth	48	24	28

	HONEST		
	Yes	Not Sure	No
Third	68	20	12
Sixth	47	27	26
Ninth	35	36	28

Cross-sectional N's: Third = 232; Sixth = 161; Ninth = 856

Unfortunately, the fourth item--the President is honest when compared with most men--was not included on the pre-Watergate ("pre" in the sense that the President was not directly implicated in the affair until several weeks after our first interviewing dates in 1973) instrument. However, responses to other questions give us reason to believe that the children would have perceived the President as being more honest before Watergate became a viable issue than after it was discovered that the President (Nixon) had attempted to "cover-up" the events leading to and following the break-in of the Democratic Party Headquarters. Perhaps our best indication of age-related perceptions can be found cross-sectionally 1975 (TABLE 13). These data at least show that presidential support starts moderately high and declines sharply by grade (third, 68%, sixth 47%, ninth, 35%).

In sum, then, we can say that our findings tend to support previous findings in regard to cognitive images of the President. Although there are changes in cognitive orientations as the child matures, support remains high in areas of political authority (run the government) and personal freedoms (gives us liberty and freedom). This positive support, however, tends to decrease when issue areas are involved--helps poor people and presidential integrity, and becomes negative (non-existent) in regard to dictating to other countries and race relations.

The initial thrust of this paper has been the presentation of empirical findings of continuity and change in childhood political orientations (attitudes) toward the President. The theoretical framework adopted

was one in which political learning is seen as evolving through an invariant sequence of developmental stages dependent upon physical and intellectual growth. A major point of departure from more traditional political socialization studies has been the recognition of political environment as an important independent variable; that is, the recognition that learning does not take place in a vacuum but can be and is affected by our sociopolitical environment (in conjunction with physical and mental maturation). The assumption has been that even though we can speak of invariant and sequential stages of development, political, social, and cultural milieus may still influence, if not accelerate or retard, specific phases of learning.

Since this is not a test of the "benevolent leader" per se, direct comparisons with much of post-Watergate findings cannot be made. However, conclusions drawn from our data do support the findings of less positive, if not negative, attitudes toward the President--particularly in regard to evaluations of the President's "performance capabilities." For example, the responses to "who makes laws" decline steadily from the third grade through the sixth: third, 50%, fourth 23%, fifth 16% and sixth 10%. We would expect a substantial decline with age; and it could be argued that since this was the fourth time these students had taken the questionnaire, the responses would be lower. However, GAT comparisons with students who have never been interviewed before support a lower perception of the President's role than our pre-Watergate data: third, 50% to 25% for 1973 and 1976; and sixth, 22% and 10% for 1973 and 1976, respectively. Similar, but less dramatic fluctuations are evident with "who runs the country": third, 82%, fourth, 69%, fifth, 73%, and sixth 63%; GAT comparisons are 82% to 60% and 75% to 63% for 1973 and 1976, respectively. It should be noted that with

the resignation of Mr. Nixon, there is a slight "rebound" in 1975; however, the less positive evaluations (attitudes) continue with the children as sixth graders. This rebound tendency is also evident with regard to "who keeps peace" in the world: third, 50%; fourth, 25%; fifth, 29%; and sixth, 16; GAT comparisons are 50% to 13%, and 39% to 16%, for 1973 and 1976, respectively. Similar patterns of lower performance capabilities for the President are present in three of the items on role perceptions.

These initial findings lead us to conclude that there is considerable evidence of sequential development of political attitudes toward political authority and political institutions; controls for two different points in time indicate that perhaps for our children the process had been accelerated, at least on a superficial learning level; this accelerated learning leads us to conclude that rapidly changing political events--we not only saw the emergence of Watergate as a viable issue, but also the resignation, under duress, of a Vice-President for the first time in history, Watergate investigations and relevations, the resignation of a United States President under threat of impeachment, the swearing-in of a non-elected President, and the subsequent pardon of former President Nixon (all historical "firsts")--have had an impact on the changing of children's attitudes toward the President.

FOOTNOTES

1. In view of a most recent Federal District Court ruling (Murphy v. Ford, Western Dist. of Michigan, 1975, 390 F.Supp. 372) by Judge Noel Fox, sitting in President Ford's hometown, the term "debacle" is not inappropriate. Judge Fox, ruling that Mr. Ford's pardon of former President Richard M. Nixon was constitutional, said that "Nixon was a 'putative rebel leader' whose administration was engaged in 'an insurrection and rebellion against constitutional government itself.'" Judge Fox continued by saying that "because Nixon and his aides were in rebellion and the United States Supreme Court decisions give the president vast leeway in handing out pardons, Mr. Ford's pardon was not only constitutional, but a 'prudent public policy judgment.'" It is interesting to note that Judge Fox's decision was based in part on Federalist Paper No. 74, written by Alexander Hamilton in 1788 in support of the ratification of the United States Constitution. In this article Hamilton argued that "the president's pardoning power should be unrestricted because 'in seasons of insurrection or rebellion, there are often critical moments when a well-timed offer of a pardon to the insurgents or rebels may restore the tranquility of the commonwealth.'" According to Judge Fox, the period from the Watergate break-in in June 1972 until Nixon's resignation in August 1974 was a "season of insurrection or rebellion by many actually in government." Judge Fox wrote that "various top officials of the Nixon administration violated the civil liberties of individual citizens' and violated campaign laws to preserve and expand their own and Nixon's personal power beyond constitutional limits." The Judge also said "Nixon administration officials formed and executed a criminal conspiracy to obstruct justice." Arkansas Gazette, Sunday, March 30, 1975, 3. My emphasis.

2. In regard to "time-lag" Piaget has stated that the invariance of the order, which is a requisite for sequential stages, "says nothing about the chronological ages of accession and does not therefore (preclude) the possibility that (peculiarities) of the physical, social or cultural milieu might accelerate or retard the succession, or even prevent a particular stage from appearing (Piaget, 1960:3-27)." More specifically, in response to the importance of ethnic and cultural milieus as salient factors in intellectual development, Piaget has proffered an explicit hypothesis

> The extent of the décalages or developmental lags between different cultural milieus will depend upon the nature of the tasks examined: these décalages would be maximum for tasks of a non-operational nature, a bit less for tasks of an operational nature but that call for symbolic structures, even less in cases where perceptual configurations are in opposition to operational structurings, and least of all where perceptual configurations and the operational activities mutually support each other (Pinard and Laurendeau, 1969:125)

3. Adopting a "process" orientation, we define political socialization as incorporating the processes by which political orientations become established and internalized in childhood and adolescence.

4. We should note at the outset that any definition proffered for "cognitive structures" is tenuous at best. Piaget himself states that we can only assume by observing behavioral patterns that mental structures exist since

> the structures are unconscious. They are expressed in regular forms of responses that we believe are discovering in the subject's behavior. We also believe that if the underlying structures did not exist we would not be able to explain such behavior. But the subject himself is not aware of these structures. . . . He simply uses them (Piaget, 1971:3)

The term as referred to in this paper is based on Elkind (1974).

5. A "schemata" is defined as a temporary structure which emerges as a consequence of repeated actions (or thoughts) (Elkind, 1974:4). With increasing age the complexity of the schematas are reflective of more sophisticated mental structures. In regard to assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration, each stage consists of new mental abilities which set limits and determine the character of what can be "learned" during that period. Predominate at times in this organization and reorganization of mental structures may be an assimilation or integration of data (objects, events, symbols) into existing structures; predominate at other times may be an accommodation or modification of existing structures to meet the challenge of the stimulus. In short, in the CD framework, the "filtering" or modification of modification of the stimulus (input) is assimilation; while the modification of mental structures (internal schemes) to fit reality is accommodation (see Elkind, 1974).

6. We use age cautiously here since there seems to be some question of its relevance to Piaget's theory. A critique by Zigler (1963:341-369) "shows the emptiness of the age concept and the necessity for truly developmental sequences to be based on psychological processes." Harter (1973:227) states that "while stages . . . can be roughly identified with certain chronological age periods, Piaget's primary intent has been to demonstrate the invariant order of the ontogenetic sequence of stages, and to document in detail the qualitatively different processes which characterize each stage." Inhelder (1957:139-162) states that "structures of thought . . . are not innate inasmuch as they are slow to appear and present variations in the average age of appearance, depending on the cultural milieu."

7. The above not withstanding, we, like other political socialization investigators do use age and its surrogate, grade, as an independent variable to the learning process.

8. The attrition rate for the four years was 19.3%. No attempt was made to contact and reinterview students who had moved out of the area.

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